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Imagination, Time, and Spirituality – Mircea Eliade's Timeless Grasp of Reality
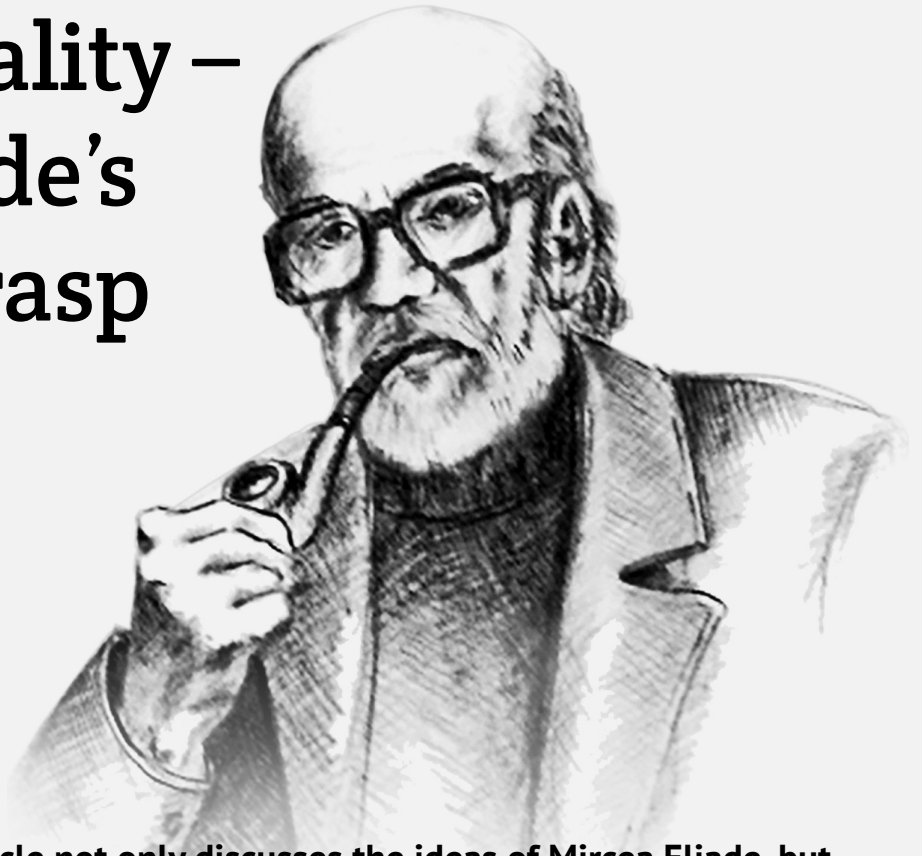
This article not only discusses the ideas of Mircea Eliade, but also draws attention to the human need for spiritual experience. It is possible that the ideas of this historian of religions may be surprisingly contemporary in the context of spirituality today. Eliade's assumption was that the essence of humanity is religious, which means that our perception of the world is originally holistic, in a sense that it is necessary for us to perceive the sacred side of the world. One of the criticisms aimed at Eliade's work is the idea that Eliade's philosophy of sacred is comprehensible only to a religious person. However, Eliade did not speak only to believers. On the contrary, if we want to perceive his readers in a limited way, we can say that he spoke more to the educated ones and those who are interested in philosophy or science in general. But in the context of today's spirituality, Eliade's work may be particularly interesting for anyone who shows interest, since his philosophy of time, or the demand for imagination can open up possibilities for insight into the essence of all spiritual phenomena.

1   Introduction

There is no doubt that Mircea Eliade was an influential scholar of his time who enjoyed professional recognition during his lifetime. Nevertheless, after his death there was a wave of criticism of his work and his approach to the study of religions. Among other things, he was also referred to as a "mystic." This label, no matter how derogatory it was intended, has its justification from a certain point of view. His research avoids positivist methods and is far from scientism. He honors life experience (he was influenced by the philosophy of life) and focuses on understanding what we can call *spiritual phenomena*, looking for the "universal" across time and cultures. His synthetic approach to the study of religions, in which he respected phenomenology as well as the hermeneutic tradition, and took into account his own encyclopedic knowledge from various scientific fields, broad language skills, and personal experience, allowed him to grasp spiritual phenomena openly and from varying perspectives.

At the same time, he was able to abstract from his knowledge what he comprehended as the essence of religious experience. He perceived a certain quality in man, which he labeled *homo religiosus*, and like others before and after him, he captured the great role that time and our experience of time plays in a person's life. He looked at this quantity through the prism of the history of religions. We can also say that the philosophical systems of the East, especially India, where the very young but already scientifically active Eliade lived for three years, had a great influence on his philosophy of time. He benefited from this sojourn throughout his life, both professionally and personally. It was his only experience with a different culture; he experienced his ups and downs there. And it must be said that Eliade's immaturity also caused difficulty for him; when he seduced the young daughter of his patron, he had to leave his house and eventually the studies in India.

We can say that Indian philosophy remained at the center of Eliade's thinking about humanity and became the imaginary "backbone" of his own philosophy. In his research, he relied on the *sacred–profane dichotomy*, while perceiving the importance of a personal relationship with the sacred, which was natural to man from the beginning of time and,

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↑ *Sketch of Mircea Eliade.*

according to Eliade, never depended on any institution. Since this relationship to the sacred is disturbed by secularization, it is essential to draw attention to it again and develop it consciously, as it brings undeniable benefits to human. If Eliade talks about religion, it is precisely these qualities that he notices in any spiritual manifestation. For Eliade, concept of spirituality is implicitly present in his entire work, when he comments on any manifestation of religiosity or religious thinking of a person, which, according to him, existed in human consciousness before we started building any religious institutions. For Eliade, spirituality appears in the sense of a transpersonal overlap present in all things around us, but also in the consciousness of man himself. And it means intimate, closely connected relationship of human beings with the environment in which they live.

From this point, Eliade views all religious phenomena as spiritual, connecting man with the environment, which provides him with the necessary meanings. We perceive that wherever Eliade expresses himself about religion and religious phenomena, as well as when he speaks about a religious person, his attitude is free, far exceeding institutionality and rules, he speaks rather about the spiritual essence of man, so he has in mind exactly this personal relationship man with the sacred.

However, this article is not a comparative study, but rather an insight into Eliade's own thinking. We focus on the interpretive and explanatory aspect of Eliade's scholar texts, while trying to find and define the important concepts and describe them. In our case, the description also includes the comprehention and reflection of the material, while the emphasis is placed on understanding the meaning of the analyzed material. So the content analysis also takes into account the hermeneutic method.

We concetrate on Eliade's philosophy of time and follow the main line of his thinking, which touches on the existential experience of time, the essence of understanding the structure of being, and the transformation of an individual or the entire society in history. We perceive temporality as the reference point of Eliade's thinking, so we focused our attention on how Eliade grasped the human need to help oneself and break free from the bondage of possible everyday events. Here he discovered a huge difference in the perception of the world of the so-called archaic and modern man. The article argues that his understanding of archetypes, symbols, and the spiritual nature of the human being is closely tied to how he thinks about time. We will see that his understanding of yoga and Indian philosophy helped him a lot in his approach to time, which in turn is related to the authenticity of the human experience. The article provides a view of Eliade's philosophy, which by looking into people's visions and beliefs discovers the timeless nature of human consciousness.

2   Methodology of Mircea Eliade

At the center of Eliade's philosophy is the concept of the *sacred*. The sacred has the ability to manifest itself in symbolic structures and does not have to be explicitly linked to some religious institution. The sacred is a concept that had basically not existed until Durkheim's time. It was in the period of modernization that an intellectual distinction was created, which made it possible to perceive the mutually opposing attitude of phenomena having a religious or secular meaning. Gradually, a situation occurred, which Nietzsche figuratively expressed as the definitive death of God, when people began to be aware of this dissension, whether in the scientific environment or in general. Nowadays, when this dichotomy is part of the common perception of the world, the question of how to define a group of spiritual phenomena, which do not belong to any official religion, is equally difficult. Despite the traditional wording, the term *sacred* can still be used, precisely in the context of today's spirituality and transformed new religious movements, the content of which does not presuppose belonging to any formal faith. The concept of spirituality, which was also used by Eliade, is still a legitimate concept today that covers *"classical spiritual phenomena, concepts and practices"* that go beyond the understanding of ordinary everyday human experience (Harris 2017, 14). And just like the sacred, we can look at spirituality as a quantity that changes the quality of human existence.

It was during his stay in India that Eliade came up with the idea of the existence of a *cosmic spirituality*, which for an extended periodwas part of the spiritual ideas of people from ancient times and was still practiced in some places in Eliade's time, for example in the Indian rural environment. Indian rural people see in agricultural matters a sacred mystery that connects them to the continuous cycle of being – life, death, and rebirth (Pals 2015, 259). Eliade likes to speak about cosmic spirituality *"in which the sacred is expressed through phenomena that draw us to the universe"* (Ferrier and Lannes 1998, 58). What is important is the ability of a person to perceive the transcendent; then he can become part of the whole and he can communicate with nature (Ferrier and Lannes 1998, 58). Eliade's concept of *religion* goes beyond organized religion, in the sense of it being institutionalized and bounded by rules. For Eliade, the *sacred* is *transcendent* and *numinous* (as e.g., Rudolf Otto perceived it), but at the same time it is also *personal*; it connects us with the world,

but above all it frees us from the mundane life. It is available to every person; we just need to decide on a way of perception. When we open ourselves up to this sacred reality, we do not have to belong to any religious organization (Ferrier and Lannes 1998, 58). When Eliade talks about religion, we can perceive that he expresses its universal aspects. He is convinced that by means of a multidimensional comparison of spiritual phenomena we can understand the actions and feelings of people in general. Religion represents the intentional reality of consciousness, which, as it is, never identifies with itself, but always exists in an overlap to a new being (Horyna 1994, 109). For Eliade, religion means a certain organization of life, which arises on the basis of a deep life experience with the sacred in its variety of forms and in a clear and complete connection with the environment in which a person lives. According to him, religion does not necessarily refer to belief in God, gods, or supernatural beings, but refers to the experience of the sacred and thus also to the ideas of being, meaning, and truth (Eliade 1984). We can say that in Eliade's concept, the religion in a certain sense takes on the contours of what we call spirituality of today, which does not refer to any specific tradition *"and as a concept enabled the inclusion of a variety of traditions under the rubric of universal morality without the baggage of competing religious institutions and their authoritative boundary maintenance"* (Van der Veer 2009, 1106).

Strictly speaking, the sacred–profane dichotomy does not quite apply to Eliade because *sacrum* is present in *profane*, which gives rise to *coincidentia oppositorum* – the "coincidence of opposites", or the "perfect unity of opposites". So it is not about the internal contradiction of the object or state, but about its integrity and uniformity. Such a holistic vision of the world is natural for a person. Eugen Fink expressed it similarly when he asked himself the question of whether the forest consists of trees or was the forest before the trees. He thus returns to the world its being, which, according to him, was already "taken away" since the time of Parmenides (Jedličková 2022), which creates a long period of ontological nihilism and deprives the world of God much earlier than Nietzsche caught it, or as Durkheim named it. According to Eliade, such a holistic perception of the world was natural to the so-called *archaic people*, and *homo religiosus* also masters it. However, perceiving the world and being as a whole requires the ability to imagine.

Imagination appears in Eliade's approach as a key moment, through which the interpretation process can occur. Because Eliade was also a professional writer, the ability to reveal the meanings of images came naturally to him. Finally, it led him to understand various religious and philosophical texts and myths. It was precisely his idea of the function of imagination as a creative approach for research of the spiritual phenomena that was highly criticized by his critics. However, Eliade's critic Adriana Berger (1986, 142) defends imaginativeness in scientific methodology: *"The imagination, far from being the mere fantasy we usually take it to be, is the active and creative scene of encounters with other worlds through which understanding is achieved… Imagination thus appears as both a means of knowledge and a modality of being, and in that sense it bears a philosophical (existential) dimension."* In Eliade's understanding, imagination also assumes the function of a mediator, which allows the interpreter to mediate meanings between seemingly incompatible worlds: the world of archaic societies and the world of modern Western society, the world of human consciousness, which perceives the world of symbols, and the world of man, whose consciousness can be emptied of symbols. According to Eliade, the world as such is not without meaning, but the meaning is hidden in the world. We can reveal it by accepting the "game" of symbols and opening the mind to imagination.

Eliade interprets the meaning of the word imagination according to his etymological interpretation. Based on the word *imago* – "image" or "imitation", and *imitor* – "to imitate", "to reproduce", he remains faithful to his own worldview and connects the meaning of this word with the inner meaning of religious phenomena, the core of which lies in the *archetype of eternal return*. *"The imagination 'imitates' the exemplary models – the images – reproduces, reactualises, and repeats them without end. To have imagination is to see the world in its totality, for the power and the mission of the Images is to show all that remains refractory to the concept: hence the disfavour and failure of the man 'without imagination'; he cut off from the deeper reality of life and from his own soul."* (Eliade 1961, 20).

The phenomenological reference stands out most in Eliade's belief that a certain connection between the *subject* (researcher) and the *object* of observation arises when investigating sacred realities. The meaning of the observed is then also resent in the researcher and becomes an ontological and existential construct that confirms being. Searching for meaning is therefore a creative (not just a rational) act at a certain moment, since meaning has an immanent character and must be discovered (guessed).

According to Eliade, the study of religions through the study of myths and symbols is carried out as a "total analysis" (*total hermeneutics*) of the "creative spirit" (*creative hermeneutics*) of humanity in an embodied existential situation in the profane world (Rennie 1996, 54). According to him, this type of religious studies can clearly mediate the meaning and signifi-

cance of religious phenomena to a modern person. This helps him understand the world, himself, and ultimately contributes to a deeper knowledge of man in general.

In Eliade's vision, similar knowledge will inevitably lead to the enrichment of humanity's consciousness, which could give rise to phenomena such as a second renaissance or a new humanism (Sládek 2002). Eliade compares the modern man trapped in his history to Nietzsche's myopic librarian who cannot free himself from his suffering position; he can only comment on it. *"Nietzsche's librarian is a modern man who, according to the German philosopher, can only comment. Whereas I believe in scholarship link with creative hermeneutics. Because it is by studying this number of texts that we can – or will be able to – lay the foundations of new values."* (Ferrier and Lannes 1998, 61).

Knowing how to read spiritual texts as symbolic forms the basis of a universal understanding that unites people across traditions. A person can use these spiritual texts in his own situation and answer his own questions to the extent that he is interested in basic existential problems related to his "immersion" in time and history. Ultimately, the ability to imagine is important *"for the very health of the individual and for the balance and richness of his inner life"* (Eliade 1961, 19).

Here we can observe parallels with the approach of Gaston Bachelard, who claims that imagination creates a different world, "differently perceptible" by humans (Karul 2006, 47). Naive immediate realism is overcome by imagination: a person enters the depth of being, and when he emerges from it into the area of everyday experience, he sees the world from a new point of view and transforms it anew (Karul 2006, 47). Imagination is a creative means that touches what is beyond man, but at the same time is man's own. It is a return to the revival of pre-reflective thinking and the associated perception of the symbolism of the world, but it is also a return to oneself, to one's own inner universe, which inevitably communicates with the world. As Bachelard (1954) argues, *"imagination has often been thought of as a secondary ability, as an opportunity for detachment, as a means of escape. We are still not entirely clear about what it is: namely, a very important dynamic function of the human psyche. The normal person is primarily inclined towards the function of the real; but how will a person create if he does not test himself, if he does not feel what can be called the function of possibility? In order to act, we must first imagine."*

3   Homo Religiosus

Throughout Eliade's work, we can observe how the ideas he promotes touch his own experience (Cave 1994, 14). As we have already mentioned, based on phenomenology, he was convinced that the phenomenon of the sacred is available only to those people whose consciousness has at least once in their life touched a moment of deep spiritual experience. Therefore, we can only interpret any religious, sacred, spiritual phenomenon if we have ever known such an experience. From his point of view, there is no such thing as an "objective", disinterested interpretation of spiritual phenomena. Intellectually, he meets Dilthey in that life itself carries universal meanings, and therefore we are able to understand different thought forms through our own life, our own experiences, and vice versa. Through signs that are external and visible, we are able to understand processes that are hidden and internal. Imagination helps us in this. The very nature of human existence represents a universal basis that does not change either through cultural diversity or historical influence. For Eliade, this unity of the human spirit is represented by the concept of a *religious person* who understands the world using symbols – *homo religiosus* (Cave 1993, 17).

Homo religiosus is an archetypal category that determines man's original relationship to reality. It represents the way in which we truly grasp ourselves in life and life itself, and at the same time it is the most authentic form of existence in the world. By knowing himself, *homo religiosus* acquires general knowledge about the world as a whole: *"Whatever the historical context in which he is placed, 'homo religiosus' always believes that there is an absolute reality, 'the sacred', which transcends this world but manifests itself in this world, thereby sanctifying it and making it real. He further believes that life has a sacred origin and that human existence realizes all of its potentialities in proportion as it is religious – that is, participates in reality."* (Eliade 1959, 202)

A spiritual person will always maintain a certain "openness" to the world of transcendent realities. At the same time, it is the world of absolute values *"capable of guiding man and giving a meaning to human existence"* (Eliade 1963, 139). Eliade contrasts the *homo religiosus* to the *modern*, i.e. *non-religious man*, who *"assumes a new existential situation; he regards himself solely as the subject and agent of history, and he refuses all appeal to transcendence"* (Eliade 1959, 203). *"Modern man is incapable of experiencing the sacred in his dealings with matter; at most he can achieve an aesthetic experience. He is capable of knowing matter as a 'natural phenomenon'. But we have only to imagine a communion, no longer limited to the*

eucharistic elements of bread or wine, but extending to every kind of 'substance', in order to measure the distance separating a primitive religious experience from the modern experience of 'natural phenomena'." (Eliade 1978, 143).

However, the ideas and thoughts of a person of ancient times is very different from those of a person of the 20th century or today. Part of mythology and religious ideas have shaped modern civilization due to culture. The spiritual world has been gradually desacralized and mythology demythologized. In the book *Myth and Reality* (1963; *Aspects du mythe* 1963), Eliade perceives this victory of *logos* over *mythos*. Ancient Greek religion and mythology survived in secularized European culture because they found expression in literary and artistic masterpieces. Folk religions and mythology were Christianized and survived in the traditions of the village population. Since these were mainly religions with an agricultural structure, whose roots go back to the Neolithic, European religious folklore probably still preserves a prehistoric heritage (Eliade 1963, 160). According to Eliade, the experience of myth and archaic spiritual behavior is minimally reflected on the level of culture, even though it represents an important spiritual phenomenon. In order for this traditional oral heritage to interest modern man, it must be given to him through a book (Eliade 1963, 161). And that's what Eliade was trying to do. That is why we can read his message on so many pages of so many books. Since he was a man of modern times, who lived through all the cataclysms of the 20th century and felt the consequences firsthand, his work was aimed at bringing the thinking of an archaic spiritual man as close as possible to a modern man. At the same time, he revealed the rich imagery hidden in it.

4 Eliade's Philosophy of Time

What has the greatest hold on Eliade's theories is his philosophy of history. It touches a person on an existential level, because it solves his attitude towards life, the world, and himself. Unless a person discovers the essence of *homo religiosus* in himself, and with it also a certain ideational "anchor" in the sense of perceiving the integrity of the world; if he identifies himself as a victim of historical events, which modern man often does, he can fall into a loss of meaning, even nihilism. Why is it happening? This is because the inner essence of every person is religious, spiritual, and bound to the sacred. Eliade explains this in his *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Eliade 1987, vol. 6, 442): *"Determined by history, modern man is thus determined by his unrenouncable precursor, homo religiosus."* According to Eliade, *homo religiosus* long for an authentic temporality that defines being, while modern man

submits (essentially "artificially") to inauthentic temporality, which results from the material world: *"homo religiosus is driven by the desire for being; modern man lives under the dominion of becoming"* (Eliade 1987, 442). Eliade connects the reality of the world with the sacred, which completes its integrity and puts this kind of reality in opposition to historical conditioning, which causes an inauthentic, only partial grasp of reality.

Here we can identify a certain connection with the ideas of Martin Heidegger, whose analysis of being takes place against the background of temporality. Heidegger defines the reality of time in terms of the *ontology of being*. The essence of authentic temporality lies in *being* itself, in authentic existence (Hroch 1997, 42). This idea is followed by Hans-Georg Gadamer, who, like Eliade, tried to stand against the destructive moments of the existentialist conception of human mortality and his determination by time, when he claimed that the original authentic temporality does not lie in the subjectivity of humans being-in-the-world, in its projected direction into the future, but in *being by itself* (*being happens*) (Hroch 1997, 42).

According to Martin Heidegger, man is thrown into the world in which he exists as a finite being. The reality of one's own mortality closely connects a person with the understanding of one's own being. Understanding is associated with feeling all the possibilities of being-in-the-world, including the possibility of not being. *"A person preserves his identity in time, while the experience of time, temporality consists primarily in the anticipation of death"* (Novosád 1995, 81). The death of being-in-the-world enables one to be oneself, whereby *"the freedom of all possible self-determination comes from the freedom of death… but no matter how being-in-the-world chooses to stay, he is always concerned only with his individual possibility to be"* (Novosád 1995, 81).

Eliade's philosophical concept is oriented towards understanding the existence of human as a finite, mortal being, who in a certain way always participates in its history. According to Heidegger, historicity arises from a series of choices that exist in relation to the ultimate possibility (Novosád 1995, 81). It can be said that Eliade orients his philosophy on man in order to facilitate his existence. Human consciousness can reflect things in their fullness if it realizes that they are completed by sacredness.

In the well-known essay *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, he developed a special conception of history, where he criticizes historical (modern) man, *"who consciously and voluntarily creates history"* (Eliade 1959, 141). He points

out that a person's participation in an irreversible sequence of historical events makes him defenseless against them, which usually leads to anxiety and pessimism. Eliade created a name for this condition: *the terror of history*. Although he realizes that the progression of time cannot be ignored, the reality of linearly flowing time is not the only reality for him, and it certainly should not be the reality which is determinative for our existence.

Eliade's *homo religiosus*, aware of the wholeness of the world, which also includes sacredness, must necessarily take into account his existential base and his own mortality, which is defined by his personality and physical anchoring in historical time. However, he also realizes that the profane being of a human also contains the *sacred character of being*. That is timeless, eternal, unchanging, and immortal. Being thus happens in an endless sequence of many *here and now*, which, according to Eliade, radically changes the human attitude towards the world and towards oneself. The perception and experience of the sacred side of being and the timelessness that is organically connected to it can be understood as a launch pad for a *homo religiosus* to be an authentic being in the world. Eliade's revelation of the terror of history, which he connects with the desire to eliminate it, is directly related to man's efforts to free himself from historicity and its consequences. Eliade, who comes into contact with existentialist philosophy, outlines a way out of the reflected crisis of existence, which must end one day. The concept of the sacred, which transcends reality but is a part of existence, is a way out of the *crisis of consciousness*, expressed for example by Sartre's awareness of one's own mortality, insignificance, and the resulting helplessness.

Eliade observes how the consciousness of a person who perceives immanent reality changes qualitatively, compared to the cruel disillusionment to which a person who is torn from the concept of the sacred and thus from the wholeness of the world is thrown. He finds the ideal in archaic societies, whose nature was a natural coexistence with nature and the related ability to build on this relationship and be inspired by it. Natural time is cyclical. If one follows it rather than linear time, one gains the necessary "freedom of death". Following the pattern of nature, unsatisfactory situations can be definitively ended and a completely new life can begin again. This man defines himself, as Heidegger claims, always in relation to a definitive end and always tends to the only possible choice – to be.

Closely related to the concept of *homo religiosus* is the concept of the so-called *archaic societies*, which Eliade identifies with original, traditional, and primordial (Rennie 1996, 42).

So we re-perceive the desire for an authentic reality characterized by wholeness and a special relationship to the sacred. Eliade thought that by understanding these cultures and interpreting their mythologies, rituals, and traditions, we can more easily understand the universality of human beings and their existential needs. That is the main characteristic of archaic societies: "*it is their revolt against concrete, historical time, their nostalgia for a periodical return to the mythical time of the beginning of things, to the 'Great Time'.*" (Eliade 1959, xi). These nations are characterized by a genuine respect for their environment, nature, and space. They perceive that nature has its own rhythm and not even human's will can change this fact. At the same time, however, they try to live in harmony with natural cycles. And that, according to Eliade, is *authentic being*. This is how they can establish a connection between the world and themselves; this is how they can understand their life and thus discover meaning in being itself. However, the human mind must be able to see these phenomena as symbolic. "*To open ourselves to the universe is also an opening to the deep meaning of each thing. Spring does not mean only the germination of plants. Young adolescents feel something more in their bodies: renewal, rebirth. This is also the case with the sacred tree in some archaic communities. The sacredness of the tree does not originate in the naivety of a few poor natives who worship it for no reason, but comes from the symbolism of the leaves that fall in autumn and always sprout again in spring. The sacred tree is a beautiful expression of the mystery of continuous cosmic creation.*" (Eliade 1979, 58).

True authenticity, according to Eliade, stems from a person's ability to transcend their own human limitations and participate in something that transcends them (Kováč 1998, 52). He participates by being able to see transcendence in the things and phenomena around him. Platonism is clearly manifested in this approach. Archaic people attribute real value only to ideal phenomena and the relations between them, while they created these relations imaginatively. Archaic man creates authentic being on a symbolic level; he considered as real only "*what was exemplary executed or created by the deities at the beginning of time,*" while "*the reality of everyday life was, in the understanding of archaic man, only a function of the celestial archetype*" (Kováč 1998, 52). The sacred side of life is thus valued as the only authentic reality, while the profane world is reflected in it like the shadows in Plato's cave. "*And the crucial difference between the man of the archaic civilizations and modern, historical man lies in the increasing value the latter gives to historical events, that is, to the 'novelties' that, for traditional man, represented either meaningless conjunctures or infractions of norms (hence 'faults', 'sins', and so on) and that, as such, required to be expelled (abolished) periodically. The man who adopts the historical viewpoint would*

be justified in regarding the traditional conception of archetypes and repetition as an aberrant reidentification of history (that is, of 'freedom' and 'novelty') with nature (in which everything repeats itself)." (Eliade 1959, 154).

What is very interesting from this point of view is the creative ability of a person with the help of the environment in which he lives to create symbols, to imagine, and thus to make sense of the world around him. We can notice that Eliade's request refers to a conscious grasp of the dominance of history in the life of the individual; it points to the possibility of Heidegger's rejection of the novelty that our history determines for us what is currently modern and returns to the tradition that comes out from the primordial need of man to coexist with nature. Eliade argues that man needs nature to be religious because we live in a world that is not just a human construct (Cave 1993, 43).

Archaic people, who lived and live in close connection with nature and its cycles, directly participate in the so-called "Great Time." Their privilege is the archaic idea, according to which time wears out in cycles and at the end of them it is periodically renewed in its original timeless state (Kováč 1998, 53). The authenticity of a person is thus correlated with participation in the *great cosmic time* (the time of nature), which ensures the elimination and transformation of profane time and its negative consequences for a person. With the help of this idea, Eliade tries to penetrate the essence of the break that was created by the invasion of time into the world and the resulting fall into history (Vrhel 1997, 57).

As a philosopher, Eliade explores the meaning and significance of being in order to reveal the reality that defines man and his culture in relation to the whole from the point of view of the "archaic". He considers the conscious creation of a sacred space with the constant support of nature's cyclical time as an act that produces meaning. In order for archaic man to discern archetypal patterns in the world around him, he must have the faculty of imagination. Then he can see in natural phenomena the symbols that support him in life and fill him with meaning. Archaic people were able to overcome the primordial imbalance of being in the world by considering the world as a symbolic place. Eliade concludes that man is characterized by symbol-making power and everything he creates is symbolic. Symbolic thinking is the only way people can orient themselves in the world (Cave 1993, 35). The man in an archaic society is not *"still 'buried in Nature', powerless to free himself from the innumerable 'mystic' participations in Nature, totally incapable of logical thought or utilitarian labor in the modern sense of the word... But it is clear that a thinking dominated by cosmological symbolism created an experience of*

the world vastly different from that accessible to modern man. Through symbolic thinking the world is not only 'alive' but also 'open': an object is never simply itself (as is the case with modern consciousness), it is also a sign of, or a repository for, something else." (Eliade 1978, 143).

However, the ability to see symbols does not make a person religious. Every skilled interpreter of symbols can, for example, see "something" in the figure of the historical Jesus. What opens man to the symbol is his ability to experience the hierophany internally. In doing so, he creates a code of understanding, with which he can decipher the diversity of symbolic expressions. In his vision, Eliade leads man in one direction – he is convinced that cosmic spirituality can "liberate" man and all of humanity (Cave 1993, 51). Archaic man saw this liberation in the return of unity to his world, that is, in the return "to paradise." Eliade finds in all religious cultures an invariant that helps man to spiritual awareness and opens him to the sacred. This invariant is transformation, awakening, enlightenment, and initiation.

As we mentioned, Eliade's first encounter with a culture that differed from European culture not only socio-culturally, but also in the field of science and philosophy took place during his stay in India, which he finished before completing his studies and dissertation. The inspiration that arose from this stay was for Eliade one of the fundamental pillars on which his philosophy rests. In the book *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (1958; *Yoga: Immortalité et liberté* 1954) he advocates the need to include Indian thought in the opinion repertoire of the Western world. Eliade calls ignorance of Indian thought cultural provincialism, which must be overcome in order for a person to start thinking in terms of global history and thereby create universal spiritual values. He was convinced that Indian thought can answer the key question about the position of man in this world, which is closely related to the essential perception of time and history (Eliade 1958, xv–xvi).

In the second chapter of the book *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (1961; *Images et symboles: Essais sur le symbolisme magico-religieux* 1952) Eliade interprets the meaning of Indian mythological ideas about time. He claims that the teachings of Yuga periods and some myths (he mentions, for example, the myth of Indra and the story of Nārada) lead to a vision of infinite cosmic time in which universes arise, last, disappear, and re-emerge in a never-ending cycle. This myth of eternal return is meant to serve people as a tool of knowledge and as a means to liberation. *"In the perspective of the Great Time every existence is precarious, evanescent, and illusory. Seen in the light of the major cosmic rhythms – name-*

ly, the mahāyuga, the kalpa and the manvantāra – not only is human existence, and history itself with all its countless empires, dynasties, revolutions and counter-revolutions, manifestly ephemeral and in a sense unreal; the Universe itself vanishes into unreality; for, as we saw, universes are continually being born from the innumerable pores of the body of Vishnu, and disappearing like the bubbles of air that arise and break on the surface of the waters. Existence in Time is ontologically a nonexistence, an unreality." (Eliade 1961, 67).

The temporal limitation of profane forms causes them to be illusory and is the cause of all suffering. Buddhism and yoga are based on the principle that all existence is suffering, and therefore offer concrete ways to definitively escape from this continuous sequence of suffering and pain (Eliade 1959, 99). However, there is also another line of thought that does not derive from the Indian teaching about time, but only a total negation and rejection of the world. We can find it, for example, in the Bhagavad Gītā. It is *phalatrshnavairagya* – "renunciation of the fruits of action" and not the world as such (Eliade 1961, 68).

When Eliade tries to interpret the consequences of the active participation of man in history, he is interested in whether the terms history and historicity, in the sense in which European thought uses them, are also found in India. He noticed that due to the meaning he attributed to them, the Indian concept of *māyā* corresponded very well (the meaning of this word is translated as "illusion", "cosmic illusion", "mirage", "magic", "sequence of transformations", "unreality", etc.). Māyā is an illusion in the sense that it has no part in being – it is a cosmic and historical development conditioned by time (Eliade 1998, 15). *"What modern Western philosophy calls 'being in a state', 'being shaped by temporality and historicity', corresponds in Indian thinking to 'living in Māyā'"* (Eliade 1998, 15). For example, in the Bhagavad Gītā, according to Eliade, māyā carries the meaning of historicity and temporality. Here we encounter the question of how to resolve the paradoxical situation created by the double belonging of a person who, on the one hand, finds himself in time and on the other hand knows that he will be lost if he succumbs to temporality, and further, whether there is a path that leads to the timelessness in this (profane) world. Māyā manifests itself through time, but it is important function is also creativity. This creative force mainly carries the cosmogonic character of an Absolute being (Śiva, Visnu). That is why māyā is also a *hierophany* – a "sacred manifestation": *"the ultimate foundation of things, the Ground, is constituted by both Māyā and Absolute Spirit, by the Illusion and the Reality, by Time and Eternity"* (Eliade 1961, 90).

Eliade's dialectic of the sacred, which he considers to be *"the original modality of all manifestations of human existence, including the profane"* (Vajdová 1992, 48), can be symbolically captured precisely by his interpretation of the meaning of māyā in Indian philosophy. The *sacred* – the "ultimate reality of all things" – arises simultaneously from the profane world of historical (changeable) events and from universal permanent forms of being.

According to Eliade, the desire to overcome contradiction and polar tensions, and to reintegrate the original one being is found in myths and pan-Indian ideas, which are mainly illustrated by myths and accessible to ordinary people, not only to sages and mystics. Eliade finds three main positions of man according to the attitude towards temporality and historicity: 1. the attitude of the ignorant, living in duration and illusion; 2. the attitude of the sage and yogi, who strive to step out of time by rejecting and suppressing the profane world; 3. the attitude the one who continues to live in his own historical time and at the same time keeps open the way to "the Great Time", while never losing consciousness of the unreality of historic time (Eliade 1961, 91).

At the center of Eliade's understanding and interpretation of the concept of *time* is the category *illud tempus*, which he used to formulate the existential status of man in the world. *Illud tempus* represents Hesiod's "golden age", the period of paradise or immaculate beginning, whose existence, according to Eliade, connects the imaginations of many peoples and is part of many mythologies. Eliade therefore considers it a fundamental element of religious thinking in general (Kováč 2008, 21). All these ideas have one common moment and that is a clearly defined border, which Milan Kováč (2008, 21) calls the "horizon of events". On one side of this horizon is recorded the entire history of mankind, that which is stored in time, while beyond this horizon there is *illud tempus*, otherwise designated as "at the beginning of time", "once upon a time", "in a sacred time". According to Eliade, the source of every spiritual phenomenon, primordial actions and places, patterns, and models, which serve people as a source of laws and values and legitimize them, is located just beyond the horizon of events (Kováč 2008, 22). It was through the category *illud tempus* that Eliade showed the importance of archetypes and exemplary behavior in man for his practical life and society as such. Exemplary archetypes considered eternal truths thus become a compass for entire generations. They firmly define a person's place in the world and give us the freedom to orient in it. Through the imitation of archetypes and the repetition of paradigmatic gestures there comes the abolition of time. *"A sacrifice, for example, not only exactly reproduces the initial sacrifice revealed by a god ab origine, at the*

beginning of time, it also takes place at that same primordial mythical moment; in other words, every sacrifice repeats the initial sacrifice and coincides with it... there is an implicit abolition of profane time, of duration, of 'history'; and he who reproduces the exemplary gesture thus finds himself transported into the mythical epoch in which its revelation took place." (Eliade 1959, 35).

Illud tempus is a category defined by the absolute absence of time. Eliade also expresses this "time" as *ab origine*, *ab initio*, *in principio* or *primordium*, by which he names the beginning of things in general. However, various myths express its timeless essence and talk about events (a certain rupture, cataclysm, decline or mistake) that caused the end of the state of timelessness, and because of which time began to flow and history was created. As time begins to pass, the quality-of-life changes negatively, and so there is a need to stop or eliminate it – the need of the return. By imitating timelessness, a different quality of time is created, the so-called *sacred time.* *"By its very nature sacred time is reversible in the sense that, properly speaking, it is a primordial mythical time made present."* (Eliade 1959, 68). Every religious holiday or liturgical time consists of the re-actualization of an event that happened *in illo tempore. Sacred time* can be retrieved again and again; is infinitely repeatable. *"From one point of view it could be said that it does not 'pass', that it does not constitute an irreversible duration. It is an ontological, Parmenidean time; it always remains equal to itself, it neither changes nor is exhausted."* (Eliade 1959, 69). It is a period in historical time that, however, imitates the beginning and ensures an imaginative return to timelessness. The absence of time becomes the very source of the sacred. The realm of religious ideas is the domain of timelessness and permanence; it is defined by non-duration. The profane world, which is characterized by the passage of time, confronts man with progressive decline, definitive disintegration, and death – non-existence. Authentic existence is therefore characterized by eternal being, and its source lies precisely in the timelessness that mythology speaks of. This non-duration also characterizes the state of total eternal present that is characteristic of mystics (Eliade 1961, 33).

Eliade conceptualized the essence of spiritual images and ideas through the relative nature of time. In the collective memory of humanity, he recorded the idea of a paradise state of beginning establishing timeless patterns in which the cores of all religions are anchored. He also noticed that a person's natural need is to constantly present this timeless state, and thereby deny the passage of time and its consequences. The central idea in his conception becomes the idea of *return*, which is strongly anchored in the consciousness of

archaic man. *"Time is understood as a desecrating agent that, in its totality, constantly distances humanity from the source of authentic action and authentic thought – from the timeless pattern that stands at the beginning of everything, beyond the 'event horizon.' It is the events that constantly distance him from that source and weaken the supposed original bond. One of the ways to eliminate this bleak state is to return to the source through the concept of cyclic time. According to him, this possibility was realized by many civilizations."* (Kováč 2008, 25).

Archaic man created an entire ritual system that helps him to re-actualize *illud tempus* and thereby devalue *profane time*. Events that do not have an archetypal pattern, and therefore create a specific profane time, are located outside this ritual scene; they no longer exist for man, they are deprived of their influence. If we pay no attention to time, it does not exist; *"furthermore, where it becomes perceptible... time can be annulled"* (Eliade 1959, 85–86). *Illud tempus* is also a state of consciousness in this case. The fact that a person lives in a specific historical period does not determine him, because he consciously overlooks what is *"especially characteristic and decisive in the consciousness of the time"* (Eliade 1959, 86). The common feature of the archaic man and the mystic is then the conscious state of "continual present", which continually re-actualizes his being in non-time, freeing him from the terror of time, while creating a state of authentic being.

In order to return to the time *in illo tempore*, it is also necessary to cross a certain border. So the relationship between being in non-time and profane linear temporal being is reciprocal and can be overcome with a certain effort. In other words, the path to it also leads through a certain "horizon of events". Archaic people ensured this transition with their own individual and collective rituals, e.g., in India through yoga as a complex practice, or in philosophy by realizing and understanding the laws of time. For a modern human, the essence of passage can be depicted by a certain personal initiation that embodies an individual path to the meaning of one's own life, because even if a spiritual person avoids profane time and in his own way tries to devalue it, returning to timelessness, to the time *in illo tempore*, does not mean escaping from reality. On the contrary, it is a return to true, original, and authentic *being*.

5   Conclusion

Eliade was an "old type" scholar. He mastered several languages, read both professional and beautiful literature all his life, wrote articles, reflections, books and oriented himself not only in history or philosophy but also in exact sciences, he was fascinated by biology. During his adulthood, he directed all his attention to the study of manifestations of the sacred. However, his research was not unique at that time. Several scholars were also devoted to the topic of spirituality, religion, mysticism, mythology, sacred rituals, or archetypes, and Eliade was very close to many of them in terms of methodology and ideas. For example, thanks to his stays abroad, in the 1950s he finally got to know C. G. Jung, with whom he worked together on lectures at the *Eranos Club*. Here he met many scientists with whom he got along intellectually (Henri Corbin, Karl Kerényi, Alfons Rosenberg, Joseph Campbell, Gilbert Durand, and others). Eliade saw Jung as the spiritual leader of these events and respected him both as a friend and as a scientist. Their work shows several points in common, the most important of which are the theory of archetypes and the integration of opposites. Eliade's ideas are not based on Jung's work; the parallels noticeable in their works such as synthesis and generalization, leaning towards spirituality and mysticism or a sympathetic view of religion are natural and not at all unusual in the context of the given time. However, both created a work that is special in a way.

It was important for Eliade that, with the help of education and knowledge about the spiritual ideas of people throughout history and the world, he could pass to people a certain, as he believed, universal understanding that goes beyond human's everyday life and common perception of temporal events, so that they could improve their experience of reality. He pointed out the importance of the presence of religion, spirituality, and the sacred in a person's life and taught the necessity of returning to such a perception. He highlighted religious studies as a science that directly brings a person closer to spiritual insight, but he also valued literature, especially myths, which for him represented an imaginary bridge between philosophy and religion due to their archetypal nature (Horyna and Pavlincová 1999, 227).

The ideas of Mircea Eliade are in a certain sense still relevant also in the modern world and in the context of spiritual life, as they can be well understood. Even in current time, which is very influenced by the internet, social networks, and progressive breakthroughs, we can observe the human need for spirituality. If we acknowledge how and why our environment shapes our philosophy, a specific way of a spiritual view of the world of contemporary man can be revealed to us. The form of spirituality without the necessary religious content is inherently very open; it is usually not based on strict dogmas and rules, rather it is affected by the environment and has an effect on this environment. For example, nowadays, no one doubts that meditation (with its spiritual overlap) is also a successful technique by which we can enrich our lives and improve our mental well-being. Various attempts have been made to prove this. As part of their corporate policy, corporations also offer meditation as part of a recovery package. Meditation has thus become something completely normal, meaningful, and necessary for mental health in our society. This can be confirmed, for example, by the well-known critic of religion, philosopher, and neuroscientist Samuel Harris. According to him, meditation is a connection between science and spirituality, because even though we do not learn anything about the origins of the universe from the insights that meditation allows us. It confirms, for example, that our conventional feeling of "I" is an illusion, positive emotions such as compassion and patience and the way of thinking, that all can be learned, and it directly affects the quality of our experience of the world (Harris 2017). Likewise, the concept of *sati* – "sharpness" has been successfully adopted by today's psychology, based on the concept of mindfulness psychotherapy. Thus, the ancient philosophy of freeing the mind from suffering is commonly practiced in today's space-time. These concepts, which have their justification even in the modern science-induce world, help to imply spirituality in the everyday life of today's man.

But Eliade called for something more. He invited humankind to our natural desire to be a part of the environment and masters of our lives. He gave us instructions on how to understand ourselves again. And this, according to Eliade, can only be done if we fully accept our spiritual, sacred essence. From this comes our ability to understand, but also to perceive time in a different way and to use our imagination, which can bring us back to living our authenticity.

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